

Brainwashed - Af Ursin, "Murrille"

Written by Anthony D'Amico

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Given how much I have been enjoying Timo von Luijk's recent collaborations with Andrew Chalk, it seemed like a perfect time to dig into some of his strange and underheard solo albums, most of which were released on his own Le Scie Dorée imprint. *Murrille*, von Luijk's debut as Af Ursin, was originally released back in 2002, but was later remastered and reissued by Robot Records. While the album's description references some fairly apt touchstones like "early krautrock" and the more experimental side of France's Futura label,

Murrille

is mostly an uncategorizably unique and idiosyncratic affair, resembling field recordings of a remote cargo cult trying to mimic jazz using rusted found instruments.

[Robot](#) / [La Scie Dorée](#)

Timo van Luijk is the sort of artist that somehow manages to stand out as being especially unpredictable and eccentric even within experimental music circles, as I have become increasingly less able to describe his aesthetic as I hear more and more of his work. Also, he seems to make a good amount of curious and counter-intuitive decisions. One such decision, for example, was opening his debut album with a piece like "Matinal," which slowly fades in with arbitrary-sounding ride cymbals, strange scrapes, and a stuttering thicket of violins. Once it gets completely rolling, it is quite likable, but it takes a long slow fade to get there. Also, the bottom completely drops out soon after that point, plunging the piece into a weirdly cavernous soundscape of reverberant drips, bizarre metallic plinking, and something that sounds like an agitated monkey armed with a microphone and some effects pedals. It is hard to imagine a more quixotic and wrong-footing way to commence a solo career, as "Matinal" sounds like an ethnographic forgery for its first few minutes, then becomes a very different sound collage that sounds like a field recording of a rain forest teleported into a deep cave. The following piece, "Secret Belly" is similarly perplexing and disorienting, sounding like someone distractedly crooning alone in yet another cave while a broken music box fitfully plays through a wah-wah pedal. It is not bad or anything, but it *is* willfully childlike and indulgent—the appeal is primarily that it is just puzzling and alien. Promisingly, the following "Paeon" is a bit more structured, resembling some kind of weird and erratic Sun City Girls-style percussion jam, yet the instruments still share space with moaning wordless chants and crunching footsteps.

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Given the amorphous and understated tone of the first half of the album, the considerably more vibrant and melodic second half comes as quite a pleasant surprise. "Astral Twist" is the first unambiguously wonderful piece on the album, blurring together an eerie vocal loop, rolling hand percussion, strange whines, and something that sounds like a strangled tuba. It kind of evokes some kind of lurching and ramshackle pagan funeral parade and van Lwijk uncharacteristically allows it all unfold naturally, accumulating some welcome power and momentum. By the end, it resembles a wild free-jazz session accompanied by a didgeridoo and a menacing groundswell of visceral non-musical textures that ultimately rip the piece apart like a black hole.

Remarkably, it continues to linger around after that, making me feel like I am being engulfed in a giant compactor filled with crunching chunks of sharp, rusted metal. "Bitter Suite" is even better still, unfolding as a strange and clanking metallic groove with a weirdly haunting melody of ringing, out-of-tune-sounding strings. Eventually, that structure falls away, but the piece then turns into appealingly evocative and carnivalesque collage of mumbled singing and broken melodies. It feels like a bizarre dream where I am being serenaded by a clown, but someone had pulled the hapless clown's hat down over his face, thus hopelessly muffling his song. The final piece on the Robot reissue is a bit of an interesting surprise, as the original album's "Loquacious" is replaced by a piece from a later CDr (2003's *2me Fascicule*). I have never heard the excised song, but the inclusion of "It's Raining Clouds" seems to have been an inspired move, as it beautifully continues the winning trend of unusual percussive grooves and gnarled squalls of free-jazz brass. It sounds like what I imagine a recording of Terry Riley jamming with street musicians in India might be like.

Taken only on its own and devoid of its context within van Lwijk's larger oeuvre, *Murrille* feels like the work of an artist who was partly in the thrall of his iconoclastic, noise-adjacent contemporaries like Organum and Small Cruel Party, yet had some rather original ideas of his own to share as well. If I had been hip enough to know about Af Ursin back in 2002, I probably would have liked the more abstract, "musique concrète" bits quite a lot. With the benefit of hindsight, however, it is definitely the imaginary traditional/international music that makes *Murrille*

a significant release. Given that aesthetic dichotomy, it is admittedly a bit of a flawed and uneven album, resembling a split release from two different artists rather than a thematically coherent whole (particularly when the quizzical sequencing is factored in). That said, it is hard to complain when van Lwijk is so distinctive and inventive with each facet. In a perfect world, *Murrille*

would be two separate EPs and I would be able to say that the "ethnographic forgery" one is a perfect, if modest, gem of junkyard percussion, faux-ethnic appropriations, and mangled jazz. Instead, I will merely say that

Murrille

is a likable early release that features a handful of inspired moments and flashes of brilliance that enigmatically foreshadow what was to come.

Samples:

- [Astral Twist](#)
- [Bitter Suite](#)

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- [It's Raining Clouds](#)